

AFFINITY STRATEGY AND AUTHENTIC READING MATERIALS: AN EFFORT TO IMPROVE READING COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT

This research is a classroom action research which aimed at 1) investigating the improvement of the students' reading comprehension after being treated by Affinity strategy and authentic reading materials and 2) investigating the students' response about the implementation of Affinity strategy and authentic reading materials towards reading comprehension. For the accomplishment of the research, 41 X IS 2 freshmen of SMA N 7 Denpasar were involved within this research. In garnering the data, reading comprehension test, observation sheet, interview guide, and questionnaire were used as the research instruments. Afterwards, the gained data was analyzed by means of qualitatively and quantitatively descriptive analysis. The first finding of the research is Affinity strategy and authentic reading materials were able to enhance the students' reading comprehension. It was proven by the mean score gained at the cycle I was 69.65 which was lower than the mean score in cycle II that was 78.75. Both of the mean scores were higher than the mean score of the pre-test which was 63.17. The second finding of the research is that there was a positive response from the students towards the implementation of Affinity strategy and authentic reading materials. This finding was supported by the result of the interview and the questionnaire. The students felt at ease to undergo learning and teaching process within the implementation of Affinity strategy. Affinity strategy assisted the students to construct their knowledge about the passages through connecting their prior knowledge and peers. Moreover, the authentic reading materials provided the students with a real language classroom.

Key Words: Authentic reading materials, Affinity strategy, reading comprehension

I. INTRODUCTION

Modern era and globalization are definitely unstoppable. This condition is tightly bounded with competitiveness which demands quality education to produce quality Indonesian youth. Moreover, in AFTA 2015 wherein ASEAN leaders have agreed to create and legalize a free solid and advanced trade association with its official language used is English. Due to the abovementioned detail, the mastery of English is urgently needed by Indonesian people. Both Indonesian government and Indonesian people have a duty to maximize the teaching of English at schools either public or non public schools.

In the teaching of English, reading skill is concerned to be the ultimate skill to be mastered. Moats (1999: 5) as cited in Westwood (2008: 2) remarks that

reading is the fundamental skill upon which all formal education depends. Through reading, students' knowledge will automatically be enriched which eventually can influence their language skills, such as speaking, listening, and writing. Its main purposes are for learning, garnering information, and getting enjoyment which are achieved when readers comprehend what they read. Burns, Roe, and Ross (1996:207) argued that the *sine qua non* or the essence of reading is comprehension. Readers get the knowledge if they comprehend what a text is about. Otherwise, they get nothing.

Ironically, in Indonesia, the common EFL reading phenomena happened is instructor's disappointment over students' comprehension. Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) under the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2012 listed that from 65 countries, Indonesia was one of the 10 lowest countries which has poor reading, math, and science achievements (Adiputri: 2014). This survey involved 510 respondents representing 28 million students in the world and 80 percent of the global economy. Based on the data, Indonesian students have pitiable reading skill. This presupposition is reasonable as reading a text which is written in a foreign language is intricate. It is undeniable that readers have an access to their first language (L1) and often use their L1 as a reading strategy. But, frequently, it takes time and builds confusion among students. They often encounter many new and difficult words and are not able to catch the main idea of the text. Then, they will be reluctant to continue reading because of unsuccessful comprehension.

Similarly, the freshmen of SMA N 7 Denpasar especially in the class X IS 2 kept struggling in comprehending a text. It was caused by several factors. The students were found struggling to identify and to communicate the main ideas of certain English written texts. Besides, they skipped unfamiliar words rather than guessed the meaning or used the dictionary to aid them. They did not know how to solve the encountered problems. It happened as they were never exposed to systematic training in reading strategies and to how to apply reading strategies effectively to improve their reading comprehension. They got bored easily as the reading strategies usually applied were neither intriguing nor attracting their attention. This pathetic condition was proven by the result of the test in which only 10 students achieved sufficient scores and the rest attained insufficient scores below the passing grade.

A careful selection of a teaching strategy which underlies student-centered learning, then, is necessitated. It is the one which is able to mainly foster comprehension as well as to lead students to be independent constructive reader through working cooperatively, namely Affinity strategy. It enables students to organize their thoughts, help them explore ideas, find critical information, increase their motivation to read, and surely help students to understand a passage. Moreover, working in a team, students are able to share their ideas and develop a mutual relationship with each member within a group.

A study which focused on improving students' reading comprehension of narrative texts conducted by Sari (2012) verifies that the students' reading comprehension can be improved by using Affinity strategy. This strategy can help English teachers, especially in reading, and motivate teachers to teach. In addition,

for the students, they are easier to understand the text. Students are encouraged to reflect on and think about reading. They discuss the text deeply by following criteria provided during the implementation of the strategy. Besides, Affinity strategy is also effective in enhancing the performance of the brain; the right hemisphere to find and gather information from the reading and the left hemisphere to analyze the information and then classify them into several categories.

Instead of depending solely on the reading process, the success of comprehension is also influenced by reading materials or references (Burns, Roe, and Ross, 1996: 10). Students need reading materials which are close to their daily activity. It is supported by Berardo (2006: 64) who said that authentic reading materials are materials which are based on daily activity to support students to the usage of a foreign language rather than to its form or structure. It leads students to feel that English is no longer unfamiliar but feel it as a daily communication tool. However, the sources of authentic materials are unrestricted on teacher's supplies. They can be taken from internet, magazines, news papers, etc.

According to the aforementioned explanation, it is crucial to empower Indonesian youth and prepare a better education. It can be started through increasing comprehension of students over English written text. A real action must be made to solve the encountered problems. This undertaking classroom action research was mainly intended to figure out whether Affinity strategy and authentic reading materials can improve the reading comprehension of X IS 2 freshmen at SMA N 7 Denpasar.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This research was a classroom action research within a cyclical process which aimed at improving the X IS 2 students of SMA N 7 Denpasar through Affinity strategy and authentic reading materials. There were 41 participants with 25 males and 16 females. The research was conducted within 2 cycles with four activities in each cycle namely: planning, action, observation, and reflection. To obtain the data, four instruments were administered. They were reading comprehension test, observation sheet, interview guide, and questionnaire. The reading comprehension test was in the form of a multiple choice type test which consisted of 20 items. The items engrossed finding the main idea, finding the specific details, deciding the synonym, making the inferences, and analyzing the textual references. The questionnaire, in contrary, consisted of 15 statements with 5 likert scales (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree). Meanwhile for observation sheet and interviewed guide, their items were developed in relation with the process of teaching and learning by using Affinity strategy and authentic reading materials. After gaining the data, it was respectively analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively by means of descriptive statistical analysis.

III. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

The research was conducted systematically which can be represented by the following findings as follows:

3.1.1 Pre-Test

To initiate the current research, an observation was done in the class. It aimed at finding clear pictures of the teaching and learning process in the reading class. The students' prior reading comprehension was identified after the students followed the reading test administered by the researchers. It was found that they had poor reading comprehension which was represented by the insufficient mean score 63.17.

3.1.2 Cycle I

After observing the students' problem and analyzing the source of the reading comprehension's deficiency, the first cycle was conducted by applying structured learning and teaching process based on the prepared lesson plan. This cycle consisted of 4 meetings in which 3 meetings were purposed to do the action phase and 1 meeting was intended to administer the post-test 1. The teaching material was descriptive text. After administering the first post-test, it was found that 17 students successfully gained score above 70 (passing grade) and unfortunately 24 students failed reaching above 70 (passing grade). Having calculated the whole scores, the means score of post-test 1 was 69.65.

3.1.3 Cycle II

The cycle 2 was conducted to make a better change. It was done within 4 meetings and each was conducted thoroughly wherein the researchers varied the teaching media such as videos, power point slide show, and flashcards. Besides, the teaching material was recount text which was selectively chosen to meet the need of the students. After administering the second post-test, all students passed the passing grade (70). It was found that 2 students obtained 93, 8 students obtained 87, 12 students gained 80, and 19 students gained 73. Even though, the frequently achieved score was 73, the students' achievement was highly appreciated because improving comprehension needs an ongoing process. Having calculated the whole scores, the means score of post-test 2 was 78.75.

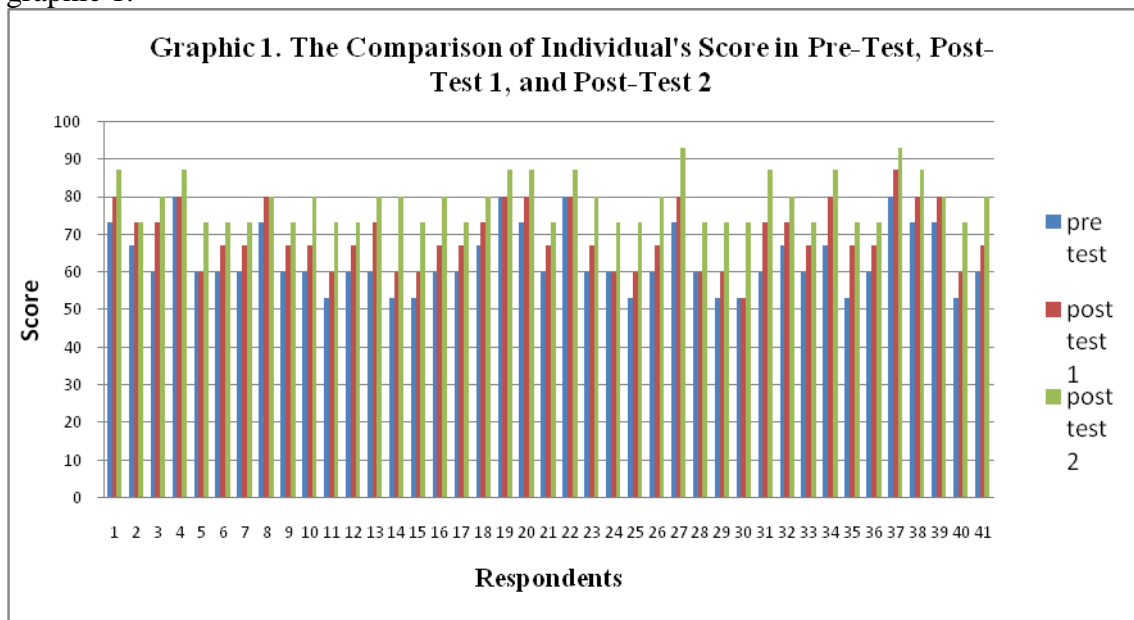
3.2 Discussion

This research was done concerning the urgency of reading comprehension as an aspect of reading skill for the students. Based on the result of data analysis, there were improvements in term of the students' reading comprehension. The mean scores of the students' reading comprehension in pre-test, cycle I, and cycle II had gradually increased. The enhancement can be shown in table 1:

Table 1. The Summary of the Mean Score in Pre-Test, Cycle I, and Cycle II

Test	Mean Score
Pre-Test	63.17
Cycle I	69.65
Cycle II	78.75

Based on table 1, the improvement of the students' reading comprehension means scores were obviously seen. It implies that the students' obstacles in comprehending a text were gradually decreased. Specifically, each respondent experienced a development as their score in each test (pre-test, post-test 1, and post-test 2) gradually increased. The improvement can be revealed in the form of graphic 1.



Based on the graphic 1, it is observable that there is a gradual development in students' reading comprehension scores from pre-test to post-test 2. The three lines, which height is varied, found on the graphic illustrate the change in reading comprehension of each respondent.

These findings are in correspondence with the research's finding of Sari (2012) which revealed that the students' reading comprehension were improved by using Affinity strategy. This strategy could help English teachers and definitely motivate them in teaching reading. In addition, for the students, they were easier to understand the text. Students were encouraged to reflect and think about reading. Affinity strategy develops effective strategies which affect the performance of the brain's hemispheres; the right brain to find and collect

information during reading and the left brain to analyze the information and then classify them into several categories.

The implementation of Affinity strategy leads students to organize their ideas and to generate in-depth understanding which compiled by using evidence and category found in passages given. This strategy mingles particular learning styles such as seeing, listening, sensing, and doing. To comprehend, readers have to use their prior knowledge to give meaning to the text. Besides, it is done through discussion since learning is viewed as quintessentially social.

Applying the strategy, teachers and students exchange their roles during study. As teachers, they shift their role from the transmitters of knowledge to the mediator of thinking. The responsibility of the strategy's application gradually turns over to the students when they are capable. It leads students to think about their reading process, develop a plan of action, monitor their own reading in order to construct their own knowledge, and self-evaluate their reading process which finally build a great comprehension.

In relation to teaching and learning plan which focuses on comprehension, learning strategy selection should be based on the principle of relevance. It is the one which is relevant and suitable to students' characteristics, objectives, and indicators of learning. In other words, appropriate and meaningful strategy is a crucial aspect of successful learning on students' reading comprehension. Following Affinity strategy, students follow several stages assisting the comprehension on the text's content. Digging ideas and exchanging ideas through group discussion are activities followed by students. Vacca (2005: 74) states that the Affinity strategy helps students organize and gather ideas, ideas, and then categorize the ideas into groups. Students are directed to think and reflect on literature they read. Therefore, both hemispheres are used; right brain collects and produces a wide range of information and the left brain examines and organizes the information.

Furthermore, in understanding an English text, the reader should have interest in reading. Being interested or having an interest in reading is the basic motivation of a person in reading. Interest and motivation to read could arise with the selection of a suitable strategy. Irianto (2006) found that the Affinity strategy steadily increase the students' motivation which results in the improvement of reading comprehension. Although they had problems at the beginning of habituation of the strategy, but their motivation to learn slowly began to rise, seen from a positive response and the liveliness of them in the classroom. The steps of Affinity strategy involve the students' skill and precision to expose information in the text.

Furthermore, reading activity is undeniably closely related to what readers read or what reading materials are supplied to. Availability of intriguing reading material which is bounded with readers' everyday life can develop their interest in reading, for example, authentic reading materials. Berardo (2006: 64) mentions authentic reading materials are materials which are exposed to encourage students to the usage and the contents of the language rather than to the form of the language being studied. This causes the students use English as a communication

tool they often use outside the classroom. Moreover, learning English is not regarded as a lesson in the classroom but as language to daily interact with others.

The use of authentic reading material written in English involved within reading activity has a very significant impact on students' understanding. When the materials are authentic, several advantages can be achieved (Berardo, 2006: 64); a) a positive impact on the motivation of students, b) provide cultural information, c) bring students to real language, and d) provide a more creative approach in teaching. The use of authentic reading materials in the classroom is certainly related to the culture conservation and students' daily life. Kusuma (2012) who conducted a research and development of culture-based reading material for fifth graders of elementary schools in Buleleng found that reading activity became conducive after authentic reading materials given. The effectiveness of the reading materials helped digging the students' culture understanding because the cultural content is close to the prior knowledge of the students.

To know the response of the students towards the implementation of Affinity strategy, questionnaire was administered. It was found that the students gave positive responses towards the implementation of Affinity strategy. The responses in each cycle can be described in table 2:

Table 2. The Summary of the Students' Response towards the Application of Affinity strategy

Cycle	Response (%)				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Cycle 1	21.75	23.54	20.29	20.67	13.80
Cycle 2	35.26	31.25	12.98	12.98	8.49

Table 2 indicates that the students accepted and felt at ease during the implementation of Affinity strategy. Comparing the students' response percentage at cycle 1 and cycle 2, the percentage of strongly agree response and agree response happened to increase significantly. In contrary, neutral response, disagree response and strongly disagree response decreased at the cycle 2.

Likewise, the researchers' observation and monitoring, in the first cycle, revealed that the majority of students were less enthusiastic following the reading activities and showed no attempt to understand the text given. To instruct the Affinity strategy's stages, it required effort and repetition because of the students were passive and had lack of interest and motivation to learn. To overcome this problem, the researchers explained the steps of the strategy and tucked particular games during learning. It was intended to make the students became excited and interested to participate in reading activities. Differ with the former cycle, the positive changes were clearly observed at the later cycle. The students were enthusiastic and focused while studying. The division of the students into groups consisting of four people was successfully as an activity to exchange thoughts, ideas, and opinions.

Additionally, the use of authentic reading materials written in English had gained the students' attention in reading as they obtained new nuanced English vocabulary. A positive change of the students' response to authentic reading materials written in English in the first cycle and the second cycle are summarized in table 3.

Table 3. The Summary of the Students' Response towards the Use of Authentic Reading Materials

Cycle	Response (%)				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Cycle 1	23.04	26.56	21.28	19.36	9.76
Cycle 2	36.33	31.99	11.89	12.21	7.55

Table 3 indicates a change in the students' response to the use of authentic reading material in reading class. It can be interpreted that the students' enthusiasm to read such materials was beneficial for their comprehension. Surely, understanding the reading materials presented in a foreign language will not be scrutinized easily by the students. Thus, offering authentic reading materials which content is often found or related to the students' experience will be useful to sharpen the skill of reading and train the students to apply it.

Based on the findings and discussions, it can be concluded that the Affinity strategy and authentic reading material written in English can improve reading comprehension as well as propose positive impact to the students who are expected to become more comfortable in reading class.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded as follows: 1) the students' reading comprehension can be improved by using Affinity strategy which is proven by the mean score in pre-test was 63.17 was increased into 69.65 in cycle I and in cycle II was increased into 78.75, 2) the students gave positive response towards the implementation of Affinity strategy and authentic reading materials. Comparing the former cycle with the later cycle, an enhancement of the students' strongly agree and agree responses towards the implementation of Affinity strategy and authentic reading materials were noticed.

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